

terms of absolution. * For commonly, If there be any cursed swearer, extortioner or adulterer, he will not be shriven at his own curate, but go to a flattering friar, that will assoil him falsely for a little money by year.'¹

The friars also undertook to share the merits of their order with sinners who could be persuaded to buy * letters of fraternity.' Some of them even gave out that any man or woman who put on a friar's dress at the hour of death could not be damned. Special prayers for souls said in a convent of mendicants were valued highly and bought at a price correspondingly high.²

Wycliffe developed, as to the forgiveness of sins, a theory entirely different from that held by the Church. He did not believe that either penance or confession was necessary. Confession, however, he held to be good and useful, provided it was voluntary and made to a suitable person ; best of all, it might be made in public as a sign of genuine repentance. But compulsory confession to a priest, who might be the most unsuitable of persons, he considered bad. It was no true Sacrament, and was quite unnecessary to absolution. Compulsory confession he declared to have been introduced into the Church by the Pope in later and more corrupt ages. He could find only voluntary confession among the acts of the Apostles. * And this shrift thus brought in,' he writes, * seemeth to mar the church in belief. . . . Such many blasphemies against the belief are sown of Antichrist in this matter, for God that giveth grace and is in the soul assoileth and doth away sin. . . . A priest should not say " I assoil," when he wot not if God assoil.'³

Wycliffe fully realised how the confessional subjected men to the priesthood, and although he wished for efficient and influential Church ministers, he had clearly grasped the necessity for the emancipation of the lay conscience and intellect. He declared that in ordering compulsory con-

¹ « 8. E. W., iii. 394; Matt., 181; P. PZ's Creed, E. S., lines 132-6; *Franciscana*, 604.
² S. 27, W. iii. 377, 420; *Pol. Works*, i. 35; *De Bias.*, 209-10; *Pol. Poems*, i. 256-7, ii. 21, 29 ; P. *PL*, C, viii. 27, C, xxiii. 366-7, C, xiii. 9-10.
³ Matt., 333, 328-9, 340-1; 8. E. W., iii. 255; *De Bias.*, caps. *he*, x. xi. ; *Sermones*, iii. 67, iv. 66-7.